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## Suggestions for Children Home From School

Due to the public health imperative of physical distancing to stop the spread of novel coronavirus, many are now working from home full-time. Parents are striving to meet the demands of work and those of their children, hour-by-hour. While you are grateful for precious time with your children, you may simultaneously feel overwhelmed by expectations to be a caregiver, entertainer, teacher, coach, and playmate – all at the same time. Behavioral Health Consultants (BHC) Employee Assistance Program understands and offers the following suggestions:

**Create Structure & Schedules.** Children and adolescents, just like adults, thrive on structure. Post a daily schedule for everyone to see and include images for younger children. Ask kids for input into the daily schedule. Schedule naptime, bedtime, meals, and snacks. Try to keep the morning routine the same as when they had daycare or school. Be sure to schedule chores, too.

**Maintain Consistent Sleep.** Even though it may feel like a vacation, children should continue to go to bed and get up at the same time each day. This is essential for restorative, restful sleep. Remove screens (phone, tablet, TV) at least one hour before bedtime. Light from devices disrupts melatonin production and negatively impacts the body's ability to fall asleep, stay asleep, and return to sleep when awakened.

**Get Moving.** Schedule movement breaks throughout the day, both long and short ones. Go outside where the fresh air, sights, sounds, and temperature shifts stimulate the mind and body. To engage children in learning, incorporate science into your longer outdoor time. You could go on a nature walk and observe trees, flowers, bugs, and birds, noticing changes from one day to the next, and then learn about them online. For indoor movement, try Cosmic Kids Yoga on YouTube or GoNoodle.com

**Create.** These times at home offer a great opportunity to learn, such as how to knit, draw figures or landscapes, speak a foreign language or learn American Sign Language (ASL), make origami, play an instrument, and much more. Bake and cook together or ask older children to bake with younger siblings. (Raddishkids.com is a cooking club) Cooking and baking incorporate planning, math, and science skills. There are also many Do it Yourself (DIY) projects online and some that focus on recycled materials. For science activities: NASA Kids' Club, BrainPOP Science, Discovery Kids, National Geo Kids, Bill Nye the Science Guy, Curiodyssey, and more.

**Read. Listen. Write.** Download audio books to which kids can listen while resting, coloring, or playing with their toys. Provide your child with a journal for writing, drawing, or collage. Some day you can look back and remember what these young minds were thinking, observing, and how they were coping. They can write a story together where each person shares two sentences until everyone feels the story is close to its end - and no twist or turn in the story is denied! Host family book club where everyone reads the same book to discuss together.

**Play.** Board games, crossword puzzles, and 3D puzzles will work kids' brains and allow them to lose themselves in an activity. Break out Twister for the whole family - it never goes out of style - and then dance for enjoyment and release those endorphins! Play games on apps such as Words with Friends, Drawsome, Draw Something, Word Chums, etc.

**Share.** Ask your kids to plan and host a family talent show, during which you can Facetime with relatives. They can make a scrapbook or an online album for aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents with whom they can't visit. Have they ever wondered about your family's genealogy? There are websites to conduct research or begin a family tree and your children can interview relatives via telephone.

**Limit Phone/iPad/Laptop Use.** The current reality is that your children are likely having more screen time than you ever wanted or imagined. Rest assured that this won't be forever. If, however, you're interested in creating parameters and agreements within your family, consider creating a family media plan. For resources and samples visit: [www.CommonSenseMedia.org](http://www.CommonSenseMedia.org), [www.turninglifeon.org](http://www.turninglifeon.org), or the American Academy of Pediatrics website ([www.AAP.org](http://www.AAP.org)).

**Plan for Better Times.** Ask your kids to start planning your next trip either by plane, car, or ship. This can bring everyone some joy and hope for when life returns to normal. Is there a part of the world that you or they have always wanted to learn about? They can spend some time reading about its geography, people, culture, cuisine, beliefs, faith, and industry.

As the parent or guardian, please make sure that you build in daily relaxation time for yourself and your children. Be sure to practice self-compassion for there is no one way and no perfect way to move through these challenging and changing times.

We are also here to help you, the caregiver, during this stressful period. Counselors are available 24/7. Contact BHC at 800-864-2742 or 203 407-1029.

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\* BHC extends appreciation to Dr. Rachel Kramer, Psychologist in Concord, Massachusetts.